

# Balancing insider-outsider positioning in near-to-practice research

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# Researcher positionality

Central premise of the argument in this paper:

- Positionality is **not a neutral aspect** of research methodology or method
- It is a fundamental feature of research design
- It needs to be considered, justified and defended at all stages of the research process

# Complexity in near-to-practice research

Ontological and epistemological complexities - truth, knowledge, best/good practice, improving practice... critique/challenge existing practice

- Professional, inter-professional and disciplinary boundaries
- Complex practice-based settings
- Role and identity as a researcher – ‘researcher self’

# Traditional binaries and dualities

Insider/outsider

Subjectivity/objectivity

Validity/reliability

Qualitative/quantitative data

# Need for more nuanced conceptions

Researchers undertaking near-to-practice research need to navigate complex boundaries :

- need for creativity, reflexivity and **ethical sensitivity** in boundary crossing
- and **nuanced conceptualisation** of the 'researcher self'

# The 'researcher self'

- able to navigate and balance multiple positionalities
- 'multiple selves' (Coffey 1999)
- 'transition from outsider to insider' (Dhillon 2006)
- 'blurred boundaries of insider/outsider' (Perryman 2011)
- 'insider/outsider continua' (Obasi 2014)
- 'insider-outsider-inbetweener' (Milligan 2016)
- 'ethics of engagement and insider-outsider perspectives' (Dhillon and Thomas 2018)

# The 'researcher self'

- examples of empirical research relating to multiple positionalities and change during research process

- 'transition from outsider to insider' (Dhillon 2006) *'Joining-up': a study of partnership in post-16 learning*

Methodology - interpretive paradigm , case study

Methods - observations, interviews and document analysis

Role of researcher – outsider at beginning of study and became more like a member of the partnership by end of fieldwork

# The 'researcher self'

- examples of empirical research relating to multiple positionalities
- Dhillon and Thomas (2018) *Ethics of engagement and insider-outsider perspectives: issues and dilemmas in cross-cultural interpretation*
- Methodology - interpretative, co-researching
- Methods - interviews, co-interviewing, co-interpreting
- Role of researchers - balance between cultural insider and cultural outsider



# The 'researcher self'

- examples of empirical research relating to multiple positionalities
- Hooker (2016) *The life stories of teachers in post compulsory education: a narrative exploration of teacher identity*.
- Methodology - narrative enquiry
- Methods - repeated interviews using visual prompts
- Role of researcher - balance between insider and outsider

# The 'researcher self'

- examples of empirical research relating to multiple positionalities
- Smith (2018) *Doing the portfolio' – pre-registration training for biomedical scientists and developing the capable practitioner*
- Methodology - constructivist grounded theory
- Methods - **stage 1**: analysis of professional documents to inform questionnaires, **stage 2** : focus groups, interviews
- Role of researcher - balance between insider and outsider

# References

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# Thank you for listening

## Questions ?



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